

Enjoy meadows, forests, wildlife and a snap quiz

Plenty of pleasant hiking trails near St. Albert

Beth McClelland
Nature Walk



RIVERLOT 56 NATURAL AREA

Difficulty: Moderate
Distance: About four kilometres (perimeter of area)
Time: About one hour (around the perimeter)
Dog friendly: No
Bike friendly: No
Horse friendly: No
Bug spray: An absolute necessity on a hot summer day

EDMONTON / This is a hike just outside St. Albert, with the opportunity to view forests, meadows, wildflowers, mushrooms, various species of birds, and mammals such as deer, moose, rabbits and squirrels.

As you drive north on St. Albert Road (Highway 2), turn right at Sturgeon Road. At an early fork in the road, bear left. About two kilometres down the road, you will see St. Albert Botanic Park on your left. Just past that, you will turn left onto Sir Winston Churchill Avenue. Soon after Kingswood Park, you will turn left onto Poundmaker Road (a gravel road). A short distance down this road there is a parking area on the left.

Just up the trail from the parking lot, near a stand of trees, there is a sign on your left, with a map of the area. There is also a large nest in a tree on the right side of the path at this point. A walk around the perimeter is about four kilometres. There are also shorter trails bisecting the area. The perimeter walk is usually a nice wide grassy path, which does narrow down at times, necessitating single-file hiking.

There are no amenities to be found here, such as outhouses or picnic tables. Nor are pets welcome. A very pleasant surprise as you hike the area, however, are the plentiful and informative interpretive signs. Although some of them merely instruct, many of them are interactive.

There are brief quizzes to test your knowledge on such subjects as owls, woodpeckers, litter sizes and life spans of various animals, and snowshoe hares. The answers are always on the back of the sign.

The trails in this natural area are also very popular for cross-country skiing in winter.

In stark contrast to the fairly rustic and solitary hike in the Riverlot 56 Natural Area is a walk along the busy

Red Willow trail system in St. Albert. The 34 km of paved trails (70 km of trails in total) connect five major parks in St. Albert: Lacombe Lake Park, Lions Park, St. Albert Place Promenade, Woodlands Park and Kingswood Park.

As you enter this trail system at any point along the way, you will share the route with bicyclists, inline skaters, strollers, joggers and dog walkers. The various connected parks also contain playgrounds, picnic tables and plenty of parking. The trail system winds through St. Albert mainly along the banks of the somewhat sleepy, but very scenic, Sturgeon River. You could pick up the trail at the east end (Kingswood Park), which is very near Riverlot 56 Natural Area, and cross through St. Albert all the way to Big Lake, and the Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park at the west end.

If you would rather explore the Red Willow trail system from the west end, Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park can be reached by catching Riel Drive (near Lions Park on Sir Winston Churchill Avenue). Just past the rugby fields, turn left onto Rodeo Drive and continue until you see a gravel parking area near a gazebo.

As you head down the paved trail, take a right at the first intersection, and pass under the bridge. A few minutes down the trail, you will pass picnic tables and a few interpretive displays on your right. As you keep walking, you can watch canoeists enjoying a trip down the Sturgeon River, and kayakers splashing around in the water. About 15 or 20 minutes down this path is the border of Lois Hole Centennial Provincial



A view of the Sturgeon River from Red Willow trail in St. Albert

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED, BETH MCCLELLAND



A bird's nest in a tree at Riverlot 56 Natural Area in St. Albert

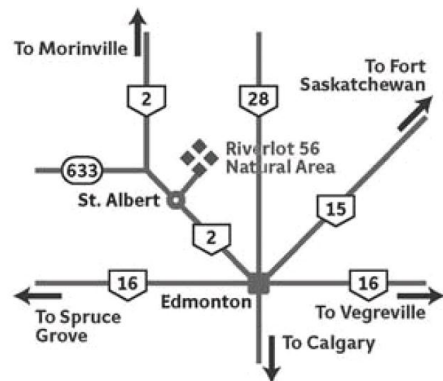


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Park. At that point there is a sign about reducing bird collisions with power lines through the use of bird flight diverters and firefly bird markers. Both devices make power lines more visible to birds in flight.

This issue is especially relevant as the Lois Hole park encompasses the former Big Lake Natural Area, which is designated as an "important bird area." Just ahead is a large viewing platform. More than 220 species of birds have been sighted within the park.

While in St. Albert, you may want to take time to stop in at the St. Albert Botanic Park. This botanic park contains seven hectares of beautifully tended gardens along Sturgeon Road (very close to Riverlot 56 Natural Area).



Lilies in full bloom at St. Albert Botanic Park